

In Search of the Castaways

New Zealand

CHAPTER I A ROUGH CAPTAIN

IF ever the searchers after Captain Grant were tempted to despair, surely it was at this moment when all their hopes were destroyed at a blow. Toward what quarter of the world should they direct their endeavors? How were they to explore new countries?

The DUNCAN was no longer available, and even an immediate return to their own land was out of the question.

Thus the enterprise of these generous Scots had failed!

Failed! a despairing word that finds no echo in a brave soul; and yet under the repeated blows of adverse fate, Glenarvan himself was compelled to acknowledge his inability to prosecute his devoted efforts.

Mary Grant at this crisis nerved herself to the resolution never to utter the name of her father. She suppressed her own anguish, when she thought of the unfortunate crew who had perished.

The daughter was merged in the friend, and she now took upon her to

console Lady Glenarvan, who till now had been her faithful comforter. She was the first to speak of returning to Scotland. John Mangles was filled with admiration at seeing her so courageous and so resigned. He wanted to say a word further in the Captain's interest, but Mary stopped him with a glance, and afterward said to him: "No, Mr. John, we must think of those who ventured their lives. Lord Glenarvan must return to Europe!"

"You are right, Miss Mary," answered John Mangles; "he must. Beside, the English authorities must be informed of the fate of the DUNCAN. But do not despair. Rather than abandon our search I will resume it alone! I will either find Captain Grant or perish in the attempt!"

It was a serious undertaking to which John Mangles bound himself; Mary accepted, and gave her hand to the young captain, as if to ratify the treaty. On John Mangles' side it was a life's devotion; on Mary's undying gratitude.

During that day, their departure was finally arranged; they resolved to reach Melbourne without delay. Next day John went to inquire about the ships ready to sail. He expected to find frequent communication between Eden and Victoria.

He was disappointed; ships were scarce. Three or four vessels, anchored in Twofold Bay, constituted the mercantile fleet of the place;

none of them were bound for Melbourne, nor Sydney, nor Point de Galle, at any of which ports Glenarvan would have found ships loading for England. In fact, the Peninsular and Oriental Company has a regular line of packets between these points and England.

Under these circumstances, what was to be done? Waiting for a ship might be a tedious affair, for Twofold Bay is not much frequented. Numbers of ships pass by without touching. After due reflection and discussion, Glenarvan had nearly decided to follow the coast road to Sydney, when Paganel made an unexpected proposition.

The geographer had visited Twofold Bay on his own account, and was aware that there were no means of transport for Sydney or Melbourne. But of the three vessels anchored in the roadstead one was loading for Auckland, the capital of the northern island of New Zealand. Paganel's proposal was to take the ship in question, and get to Auckland, whence it would be easy to return to Europe by the boats of the Peninsular and Oriental Company.

This proposition was taken into serious consideration.

Paganel on this occasion dispensed with the volley of arguments he generally indulged in. He confined himself to the bare proposition, adding that the voyage to New Zealand was only five or six days-- the distance, in fact, being only about a thousand miles.

By a singular coincidence Auckland is situated on the self-same parallel--

the thirty-seventh--which the explorers had perseveringly followed since they left the coast of Araucania. Paganel might fairly have used this as an argument in favor of his scheme; in fact, it was a natural opportunity of visiting the shores of New Zealand.

But Paganel did not lay stress on this argument. After two mistakes, he probably hesitated to attempt a third interpretation of the document. Besides, what could he make of it? It said positively that a "continent" had served as a refuge for Captain Grant, not an island. Now, New Zealand was nothing but an island. This seemed decisive. Whether, for this reason, or for some other, Paganel did not connect any idea of further search with this proposition of reaching Auckland. He merely observed that regular communication existed between that point and Great Britain, and that it was easy to take advantage of it.

John Mangles supported Paganel's proposal. He advised its adoption, as it was hopeless to await the problematical arrival of a vessel in Twofold Bay. But before coming to any decision, he thought it best to visit the ship mentioned by the geographer. Glenarvan, the Major, Paganel, Robert, and Mangles himself, took a boat, and a few strokes brought them alongside the ship anchored two cables' length from the quay.

It was a brig of 150 tons, named the MACQUARIE. It was engaged in the coasting trade between the various ports

of Australia and New Zealand. The captain, or rather the "master," received his visitors gruffly enough. They perceived that they had to do with a man of no education, and whose manners were in no degree superior to those of the five sailors of his crew. With a coarse, red face, thick hands, and a broken nose, blind of an eye, and his lips stained with the pipe, Will Halley was a sadly brutal looking person. But they had no choice, and for so short a voyage it was not necessary to be very particular.

"What do you want?" asked Will Halley, when the strangers stepped on the poop of his ship.

"The captain," answered John Mangles.

"I am the captain," said Halley. "What else do you want?"

"The MACQUARIE is loading for Auckland, I believe?"

"Yes. What else?"

"What does she carry?"

"Everything salable and purchasable. What else?"

"When does she sail?"

"To-morrow at the mid-day tide. What else?"

"Does she take passengers?"

"That depends on who the passengers are, and whether they are satisfied with the ship's mess."

"They would bring their own provisions."

"What else?"

"What else?"

"Yes. How many are there?"

"Nine; two of them are ladies."

"I have no cabins."

"We will manage with such space as may be left at their disposal."

"What else?"

"Do you agree?" said John Mangles, who was not in the least put out by the captain's peculiarities.

"We'll see," said the master of the MACQUARIE.

Will Halley took two or three turns on the poop, making it resound with iron-heeled boots, and then he turned abruptly to John Mangles.

"What would you pay?" said he.

"What do you ask?" replied John.

"Fifty pounds."

Glenarvan looked consent.

"Very good! Fifty pounds," replied John Mangles.

"But passage only," added Halley.

"Yes, passage only."

"Food extra."

"Extra."

"Agreed. And now," said Will, putting out his hand, "what about the deposit money?"

"Here is half of the passage-money, twenty-five pounds," said Mangles, counting out the sum to the master.

"All aboard to-morrow," said he, "before noon. Whether or no, I weigh anchor."

"We will be punctual."

This said, Glenarvan, the Major, Robert, Paganel, and John Mangles left the ship, Halley not so much as touching the oilskin that adorned his red locks.

"What a brute," exclaimed John.

"He will do," answered Paganel. "He is a regular sea-wolf."

"A downright bear!" added the Major.

"I fancy," said John Mangles, "that the said bear has dealt in human flesh in his time."

"What matter?" answered Glenarvan, "as long as he commands the MACQUARIE, and the MACQUARIE goes to New Zealand. From Twofold Bay to Auckland we

shall not see much of him; after Auckland we shall see him no more."

Lady Helena and Mary Grant were delighted to hear that their departure was arranged for to-morrow. Glenarvan warned them that the MACQUARIE was inferior in comfort to the DUNCAN. But after what they had gone through, they were indifferent to trifling annoyances. Wilson was told off to arrange the accommodation on board the MACQUARIE. Under his busy brush and broom things soon changed their aspect.

Will Halley shrugged his shoulders, and let the sailor have his way. Glenarvan and his party gave him no concern. He neither knew, nor cared to know, their names. His new freight represented fifty pounds, and he rated it far below the two hundred tons of cured hides which were stowed away in his hold. Skins first, men after. He was a merchant. As to his sailor qualification, he was said to be skillful enough in navigating these seas, whose reefs make them very dangerous.

As the day drew to a close, Glenarvan had a desire to go again to the point on the coast cut by the 37th parallel. Two motives prompted him. He wanted to examine once more the presumed scene of the wreck. Ayrton had certainly been quartermaster on the BRITANNIA, and the BRITANNIA might have been lost on this part of the Australian coast; on the east coast if not on the west. It would not do to leave without thorough investigation, a locality which they were never to revisit.

And then, failing the BRITANNIA, the DUNCAN certainly had fallen into the hands of the convicts. Perhaps there had been a fight? There might yet be found on the coast traces of a struggle, a last resistance. If the crew had perished among the waves, the waves probably had thrown some bodies on the shore.

Glenarvan, accompanied by his faithful John, went to carry out the final search. The landlord of the Victoria Hotel lent them two horses, and they set out on the northern road that skirts Twofold Bay.

It was a melancholy journey. Glenarvan and Captain John trotted along without speaking, but they understood each other. The same thoughts, the same anguish harrowed both their hearts. They looked at the sea-worn rocks; they needed no words of question or answer. John's well-tryed zeal and intelligence were a guarantee that every point was scrupulously examined, the least likely places, as well as the sloping beaches and sandy plains where even the slight tides of the Pacific might have thrown some fragments of wreck. But no indication was seen that could suggest further search in that quarter--all trace of the wreck escaped them still.

As to the DUNCAN, no trace either. All that part of Australia, bordering the ocean, was desert.

Still John Mangles discovered on the skirts of the shore evident traces of camping, remains of fires recently kindled under solitary

Myall-trees. Had a tribe of wandering blacks passed that way lately?
No, for Glenarvan saw a token which furnished incontestable proof
that the convicts had frequented that part of the coast.

This token was a grey and yellow garment worn and patched,
an ill-omened rag thrown down at the foot of a tree. It bore
the convict's original number at the Perth Penitentiary. The felon
was not there, but his filthy garments betrayed his passage.
This livery of crime, after having clothed some miscreant,
was now decaying on this desert shore.

"You see, John," said Glenarvan, "the convicts got as far as here!
and our poor comrades of the DUNCAN--"

"Yes," said John, in a low voice, "they never landed, they perished!"

"Those wretches!" cried Glenarvan. "If ever they fall into my hands
I will avenge my crew--"

Grief had hardened Glenarvan's features. For some minutes
he gazed at the expanse before him, as if taking a last look at
some ship disappearing in the distance. Then his eyes became dim;
he recovered himself in a moment, and without a word or look,
set off at a gallop toward Eden.

The wanderers passed their last evening sadly enough. Their thoughts

recalled all the misfortunes they had encountered in this country. They remembered how full of well-warranted hope they had been at Cape Bernouilli, and how cruelly disappointed at Twofold Bay!

Paganel was full of feverish agitation. John Mangles, who had watched him since the affair at Snowy River, felt that the geographer was hesitating whether to speak or not to speak. A thousand times he had pressed him with questions, and failed in obtaining an answer.

But that evening, John, in lighting him to his room, asked him why he was so nervous.

"Friend John," said Paganel, evasively, "I am not more nervous to-night than I always am."

"Mr. Paganel," answered John, "you have a secret that chokes you."

"Well!" cried the geographer, gesticulating, "what can I do? It is stronger than I!"

"What is stronger?"

"My joy on the one hand, my despair on the other."

"You rejoice and despair at the same time!"

"Yes; at the idea of visiting New Zealand."

"Why! have you any trace?" asked John, eagerly. "Have you recovered the lost tracks?"

"No, friend John. No one returns from New Zealand; but still-- you know human nature. All we want to nourish hope is breath. My device is 'Spiro spero,' and it is the best motto in the world!"